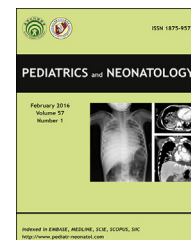


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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Health Care for Adolescents in Taiwan: An Emerging Role of Pediatricians



The paper by Chuang et al.¹ is an interesting and important study looking at the pattern of health care-seeking behavior among patients younger than 18 years. The discussions around the crucial role of pediatricians in terms of competence and appropriateness in the medical services provided to sick children, including teenagers, are worthy of applause. The authors concluded an urgent need for advocacy of visits to pediatricians from the childhood up to age 18 years.¹

One of the major findings showed that adolescents' medical visits to pediatricians declined in importance with age as compared to those to family physicians. As argued, a general lack of understanding the difference between medical specialties causes many people to choose a doctor according to their physical symptoms.¹ Another important factor, however, may be inherent to the complexity and diversity of health problems particularly encountered by this age group. In a recent survey of high school students in Southern Taiwan, respondents expressed a wide array of health needs but rarely consulted a doctor.² Adolescent health problems are probably underaddressed in our current health care system and may therefore be less representative in the health care insurance claim-based research. Of the same cohort of individuals, only 40% reported having a regular doctor; interestingly, nearly 60% of them chose pediatricians, as compared to another 20% choosing family physicians, as their trusted regular doctor.² As a frontline guardian of children's health, pediatricians should be able to take a leading role in providing continual care of quality at this critical transition to adulthood.

With regard to adolescent health care, there are two emerging concerns. One is related to the education of adolescent medicine for the community of pediatricians. A previous survey collaborating with the Taiwan Pediatric Association revealed that most pediatricians perceived inadequate skills and experience in managing many adolescent health problems.³ Despite this, they consistently expressed a strong interest in receiving further adolescent medicine training. Corresponding to their unmet training

needs, the Taiwan Pediatric Association has recently held a number of continual education conferences with the focus on adolescent health problems. It is hoped that adolescent medicine could be more structurally incorporated into the pediatric residency program. The other concern is how to improve youth-friendliness in the medical services. Expectations from the users' (adolescents') perspective should be heard and the current care model tailored accordingly.² Given the complex nature of adolescent health problems, a multidisciplinary approach may be necessary to better serve their wide-ranging health needs.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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May 4, 2015

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pedneo.2015.06.007>

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